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ABSTRACT

This publication discusses the increasing problem of student absenteeism and describes an experimental school attendance policy that was implemented at Napa (California) High School in 1975. The policy designates a maximum of 12 absences per semester as the maximum allowable for each student under normal circumstances; after 13 absences from any class, students risk forfeiture of credit and can be dropped from class enrollment. The policy also provides that after a student's fourth, eighth, and twelfth absences from any class, his parents will be sent a written form indicating the dates of the student's absences. During the first year under the new attendance policy, absenteeism at Napa High School was reduced approximately 50 percent, from an average of 8 to 10 percent for 1972-74 to 4.5 percent for 1975. A complete copy of the Napa High attendance policy and a sample of the parent's notification form are included. (JG)

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NAPA HIGH SCHOOL ATTENDANCE POLICY

AN EXPERIMENT TO REDUCE UNNECESSARY SCHOOL ABSENCES

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

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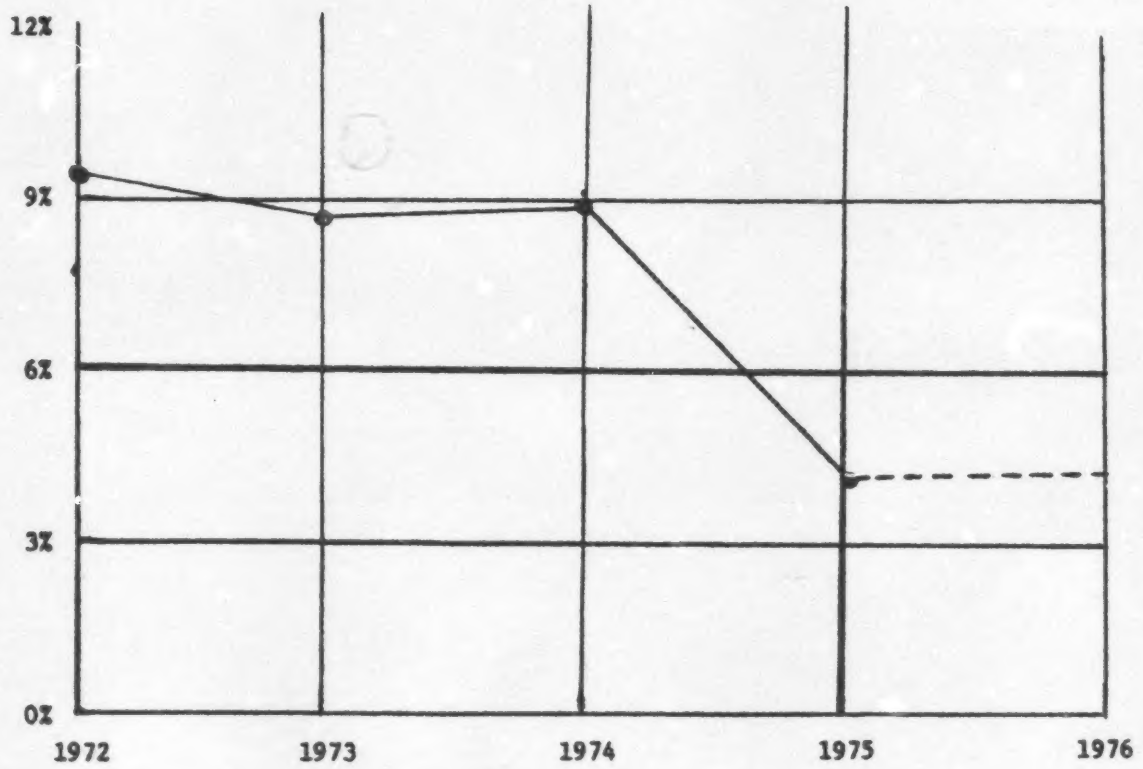
4 YEAR ABSENCE REPORT 1972-1975



EA 007 992

NAPA VALLEY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
NAPA HIGH SCHOOL

September 15, 1975

TO: Members of the Board of Education
Dr. J. Win Payne, Superintendent

FROM: Mr. Tom Fotinos, Principal

SUBJECT: ATTENDANCE POLICY FOR 1975-76

STUDENT ATTENDANCE AND ABSENTEEISM

GENERAL BACKGROUND

Student absenteeism continues to be a serious problem for the secondary schools. In 1973 and again in 1974 National Association of Secondary Schools Principals members rated poor attendance as their "most perplexing student problem". These ratings come from Secondary Principals NASSP'S annual poll of its members on school organization and curriculum.

Teachers, counselors, and administrators are spending increased time just to manage the attendance situation, less opportunity remains for more constructive tasks. The quality of teaching, counseling, and administering can easily be affected by excessive attendance patterns.

Assuming a school year of 180 days, health officials estimate that a "normal" absentee rate would be seven to nine days for each student. Translated into percentages, the expected rate would be four to five percent per year. (Students who would exceed this rate because of long-term illness would amount to less than one percent per year of the total enrollment.) Today, however, absentee rates of 10 to 15 percent are not uncommon. In some urban schools, the rate exceeds 30 percent. Our school average ranges between 8 - 12% generally. During Final Examination week, less than 2%.

While absenteeism can be a symptom of an inadequate curriculum, analysis indicates that this is only one of the many causes. Numerous schools with broad and flexible programs continue to face severe attendance problems. Napa High has a very broad diversified curriculum to offer students. Obviously, growing absenteeism has deep roots leading in many directions. The causes are personal as well as institutional.

Contributing to poor attendance may be family attitudes, social forces, peer pressures, economic circumstances, home-school relationships, student age, and health.

Among the "new causes cited for the dramatic growth of student absence are winter vacations, erosion of parental control, economic affluence, novel life-styles, and a breakdown in court enforcement of attendance laws.

School personnel, of course, understand that the problem extends into adulthood. Job vacancy and absenteeism is of a growing consequence to business and professional world. But the imperative to schools for attendance still exists. On the practical level, student attendance is required by law. On another level, dependability is a trait admired and rewarded in society generally and thus is a value that our schools should nourish for the benefit of students.

EFFECTS ON THE SCHOOL

Frequent absences of pupils from regular classroom learning experiences disrupt the continuity of the instructional process. The benefit of regular classroom instruction is lost and cannot be entirely regained, even by extra afterschool instruction. Consequently, many pupils in these circumstances are able to achieve only mediocre success in their academic programs. The school cannot teach pupils who are not present. The entire process of education requires a regular continuity of instruction, classroom participation, learning experiences, and study in order to reach the goal of maximum educational benefits for each individual child. The regular contact of the pupils with one another in the classroom and their participation in well-planned instructional activity under the tutelage of a competent teacher are vital to this purpose. This is the well-established principle of education which underlies and gives purpose to the requirement of compulsory schooling in this and every other state in the nation.

As yet no school feels that it has the "final word" on attendance. Certain common themes, however, are present in most of the successful policies:

The policies are strong. When little or nothing is done about attendance the problem gets worse. Schools making headway on attendance are schools which expend considerable thought and effort to solving the problem.

Participation in the formulation of attendance policy is broadly based. Administrators, teachers, students, and parents frequently are involved in policy making.

Policies clearly specify in writing attendance expectations and delineate the outcomes of good and poor attendance.

Policies are well publicized. Each parent and student repeatedly has been informed of attendance requirements.

Policies are consistently enforced. At each level of enforcement - teacher, counselor, dean, principal-compliance with the policy is expected.

Immediate follow-up on absences is made by a letter, a telephone call to the home, or some other means.

FINDINGS FROM RESEARCH ON ATTENDANCE

Absenteeism is on the increase. Absenteeism rose during each succeeding year of the five years studied.

Second semester absenteeism is higher than first semester absenteeism.

Days of important tests experience a low rate of absenteeism. Moreover, there is a decline in absenteeism during the week of semester final examinations.

The first and last days of the week have the highest rates of absenteeism. Wednesdays and Thursdays are the days when absenteeism is lowest. Absenteeism on Fridays is usually lower than on Mondays.

Boys in the first three years of high school generally have lower rates of absenteeism than girls at the same grade level. Senior boys have a slightly higher rate of absenteeism than senior girls.

With each succeeding class and age group, from the ninth grade through the twelfth, absenteeism increases.

Students who live with both parents generally have a lower rate of absenteeism than those who live with one parent or guardian.

Students in the "college preparatory" program generally have the lowest rate of absenteeism followed by students in the "business education" and the "general program" respectively.

Students who participate in school-sponsored athletic and non-athletic activities generally have lower rates of absenteeism than those who participate in but one or none of these activities.

The poorer the student's personality rating by teachers generally the higher the rate of absenteeism.

OUR NEEDS

As a result of discussion at a faculty meeting held in the fall, whereby the attendance practices of students was an agenda item, a faculty/administration study committee was formed. The faculty was unanimous for the committee to develop and recommend a policy in having attendance requirements as part of the earning of course credit a school wide policy and hopefully a district policy as well. Presently, this relationship is an assumption in most cases. A recently appointed Faculty Curriculum Review Committee is reviewing our curriculum and making recommendations for providing opportunities to further meet the needs of some students who are having difficulties in certain segments of their school program.

The Attendance Policy Study Committee studied the attendance survey completed by teachers, heard from teachers, counselors, deans, students, etc. on some of the present problems as well as analyzing some of the newer successful practices used on other districts in California and other states.

PROPOSED PLAN

Napa High School Administration and faculty, after an analysis by the Attendance Policy Study Committee, proposed a policy which would place more of the responsibility for attendance on the student by making the earning of credit directly contingent on his regular attendance, assuming satisfactory completion of class work.

EXISTING PROBLEM

Although the ADA loss total is reasonably low at Napa High School as compared to other schools, a number of students have records of excessive all day as well as period absences and has increased steadily over the past several years, causing such problems as:

1. Lack of self-discipline.
2. Lowering teacher efficiency by necessitating much repetition of explanation of subject matter for returning absentees.
3. Lessening of the effectiveness of the examination as a learning instrument, since results often can't be discussed until absentees have made up the test.
4. Lowering student morale, since many students receive the same number of credits for far less time in class.

5. Increasing teacher frustration, since many types of classroom work, such as lectures, films, panels and class discussions, cannot be made up.
6. Lowering of educational standards, as work tends to be geared to the rate of absenteeism.
7. Wasting of valuable class time with traditional attendance practices which are not effective.
8. Students have a responsibility to contribute to the class.
9. Financial support of the educational program.
10. We are educating students for the future to be dependable responsible citizens.
11. Student falsification of absence excuse to cover absences thereby contributing to the teaching of dishonesty.

BASIC PREMISES

The Attendance Policy is based on the following premises:

1. Each class period contains instructional material or activities that are of significant importance to the student.
2. A student should evidence productive attendance a majority of the semester in order to qualify for 5 semester periods.

SUPPORT

This policy has been reviewed with the Executive Board of PTSA, Executive Council of the ASB as well as the Principal Advisory Committee which support this concept. In presenting the proposal to Secondary Principals last spring, it was unanimously endorsed and recommended to the Superintendent that it be implemented as a pilot program for this school year evaluation. Parents and students have been informed and to date we have witnessed an improvement of overall attendance compared to last year at the same time.

ATTENDANCE PROCEDURES

1. This policy designates twelve (12) days absence per semester as maximum allowed for normal circumstances of regular school attendance. The twelve (12) days of absence are to accommodate:

   a. Personal illness
   b. Professional appointments that could not be scheduled outside the regular school day
   c. Serious personal or family problems

   Thirteen or more absences during a semester can jeopardize a student's enrollment status in that class.

2. After the fourth (4), eighth (8), and twelfth (12) absences from any class period, the teacher of that class will complete a form indicating the dates of student absences. This form will be mailed home by the attendance office and copies issued to appropriate staff members.[1] The student shall be counseled by the teacher at the fourth, (4) absence. The teacher and counselor/administrator shall counsel the student following the eighth (8) and twelfth (12) absences. A personal[2] school contact will be made with the parent immediately following the 8th day of absence. The parent will be encouraged to initiate a conference with the teacher to clarify absenteeism and any questions which may be raised. Chronic illness and other extenuating circumstances will be considered in extending the limit of allowed absences.

3. With the accumulation of thirteen (13) absences during the semester for any class period, the student risks forfeiture of course credit in that class and can be dropped from class enrollment. Parents will be notified.

4. A review by the Napa High School Attendance Review Board (NHSARB) consisting of representation from administration, counseling and faculty may be requested by the student, teacher, parent or counselor to examine the specific conditions relating to the individual case any time prior to dropping from class. The NHSARB may extend the absence limit, continue the student's enrollment in the class(es) on a probationary basis, or take such action as is indicated. The parent will be promptly informed in writing of the results of such hearing.

5. School-sponsored or sanctioned activities for which the student has been properly pre-excused are exempted from, and will not pertain to this policy.

6. Disciplinary suspension days will be included in the total days absent.

7. Tardiness is defined as any unexcused appearance of a student beyond the scheduled time that a class begins. Three (3) incidents of unexcused tardies to a class will be considered as equal to one (1) absence. Tardiness of 20 minutes or more to a class may, at the descretion of the teacher, be considered an absence. The teacher shall notify the student when such incidents are recorded as absences.

3. Students must maintain a minimum enrollment in four courses to continue as a regular student; one study hall permitted. Students enrollment shall be dropped when the minimum of four classes is not maintained.

9. It is extremely important that students realize that the twelve (12) days of absences built into the attendance policy are not to be considered as authorized days for absences but for illness and emergencies.

10. A School Attendance Advisory Committee consisting of administration, faculty, and students will periodically evaluate this policy in an effort to maintain guidelines that reflect the school's educational philosophy and contribute to the welfare of the students.

Footnotes:

1. Copies to counselor, attendance office, teacher.

2. Teacher contacts parent by phone, if not successful, refer to counselor for follow-up. This contact at end of 8th day is most important. It does assure the home is aware and also allows time to make any adjustments to overcome difficulties. It provides the resources of the school working with the home cooperatively, to offer assistance to the student.

Conclusion

With this plan, Napa High School staff will be better able to accomplish the goals outlined including developing more positive attendance habits in students.

NAPA VALLEY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

NAPA HIGH SCHOOL
2475 JEFFERSON STREET
NAPA, CALIFORNIA 94558

TOM D. FOTINOS
Principal

DATE _____

DEAR PARENTS:

The purpose of this letter is to provide parents and students with timely information about attendance records in the following class. Your child _____

_____ Grade _____ was absent from his/her _____ period (subject) _____

class on the following days _____

We believe what maximum educational achievement occurs for students through regular attendance in classes, while excessive absence results in below average achievement and possibly even failure.

After accumulating thirteen absences from any one class, the student will not receive credit for that course, and may be dropped from that course.

PLEASE REFER TO COMPLETE ATTENDANCE POLICY FOR FURTHER DETAILS AND CLARIFICATION.

Please contact your child's counselor regarding absences and academic progress. Appointments can be arranged by calling the Counseling office, 252-5316.

Very truly yours,

_____
Teacher, Napa High School

PARENT CONTACTED BY: TEACHER ☐
COUNSELOR ☐
OTHER ☐

COMMENTS:

_____

_____

COPIES: WHITE - PARENTS
CANARY - COUNSELOR
PINK - OFFICE
GOLDENROD - RETURNED TO TEACHER

THIS IS THE
_____ FIRST NOTICE (4 absences)
_____ SECOND NOTICE (8 absences) Conference with Counselor is recommended.
_____ THIRD NOTICE (12 absences)
_____ FOURTH NOTICE (13 absences)

NVUSD 188

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NAPA VALLEY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
NAPA HIGH SCHOOL
January 30, 1976

TO: Mr. Clayton Long, Director of Secondary Education
FROM: Ron Feist and Tom Fotinos
SUBJECT: SCHOOL WITHIN A SCHOOL AT NAPA HIGH SCHOOL

Working with our Alternative Education Committee, the following guidelines have been constructed for the implementation of a "School Within A School" at Napa High.

1. For the spring semester 1976 we form a class designed to work with students that are having attendance difficulties. The students would volunteer to be a part of the program and would be recommended by Jim Rogers. The title, Selected Independent Study LAP, has been chosen. We would start out with one coordinating staff member.

2. In the Selected Independent Study Lap, methods will be employed to try to reach the cause of the attendance problem and hopefully some remedy prescribed to enable the student to succeed. The interest of the student would be assessed via a series of interview, discussions and non threatening tests. Great effort will be given to help students establish his/her own goals. Goals that will provide the student with a sense of purpose and direction. Some diagnosis and prescribed principles will be implemented on an elementary scale. A great amount of time will be given to the affective domain of education. Counseling techniques will be employed to help the student create a positive self image.

3. Almost all the members of the committee indicated their willingness to aid this group of youngsters during some of their conference time. Their support might consist of helping on field trips, group counseling, teaching concepts within their respective disciplines. Andrea Eppinger will act as coordinator of this one period program. We are hoping other teachers in our school might want a similiar opportunity as the program expands. We should utilize some of the expertise of Project Community for dealing in the affective domain when working with students.

4. In the fall of 1976, design a format that takes in some of the experimental concepts that were experienced during the spring of 1976, that would lead to a program that involves more students and more time. We, also, draw up the services available in Project Community. A feasibility study will be run this spring to determine the possibilities of implementing a Project Community Program at Napa High.

5. Using as a starting point, the abstract of the Restructured Instructional Strategies for Education, continue to develop a "project" for funding in the state critical needs category. The Alternative Education Committee will be working closely with Bob Wells to write the needs assessment and over-all review during the spring of 1976.

   During the fall of 1976, goals, objectives and activities will be developed as part of the project proposal. A detailed plan for a "School Within A School" should be completed by January 15, 1977 for the district project review committee. The evaluation of the pilot class or classes should give a great deal of data to help in the development of the "School Within A School" design.

6. Even though a great deal of research will take place between now and the fall of 1977, the general principles of our "School Within A School" are:

   a. The students will take a series of diagnostic tests to establish their proficiency in the four major areas of the curriculum; language skills, mathematics, social science and science. These tests will be criterion reference tests in conjunction with a norm testing program which is available to establish skill levels of each student.

   b. Profiles will be established for each project pupil defining affective domain characteristics and vocational and advocation interests and skill levels. A "true needs" assessment of each student going through the evaluation program will be established as well as his/her respective position in their cognitive and affective educational domains.

   c. Teaching, counseling, instructional aides, and administrative staff will be selected based upon these criteria: interest in the school within a school, humanistic, client-based approach to education, ability to relate to other staff members in the program, belief in a personalized approach to learning, and demonstrated ability to aid learners toward the acquisition of a positive self image.

   d. Based upon the diagnostic assessments a prescriptive program of instruction will be designed for each student that takes into account: future vocational and advocational desires, Napa High graduation requirements, levels of proficiency, staff expertise, faculty availability, cost considerations and state proficiency expectations. Competency based requirements will be the rule rather than the exception, demonstrated by developed criterion reference tests to evaluate proficiency.

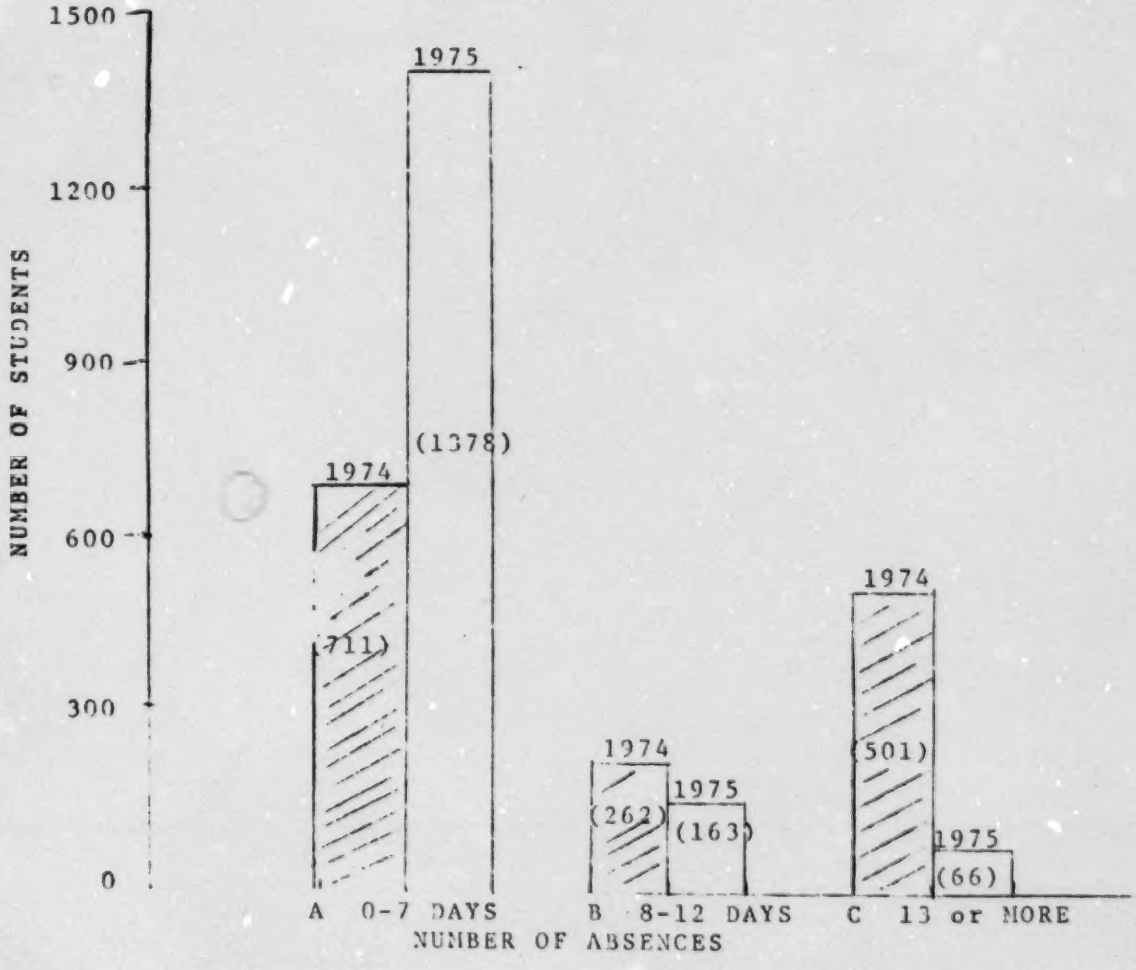
NAPA VALLEY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

NAPA HIGH SCHOOL
February 19, 1976

SUPPORTIVE ATTENDANCE DATA

A. STUDENT HEALTH COMPONENT

HEALTH OFFICIALS ESTIMATE, ASSUMING A SCHOOL YEAR OF 180 DAYS, THAT A "NORMAL' ABSENTEE RATE WOULD BE SEVEN TO NINE DAYS FOR EACH STUDENT. TRANSLATED INTO PERCENTAGES, THE EXPECTED RATE WOULD BE FOUR OR FIVE PERCENT PER YEAR. STUDENTS WHO WOULD EXCEED THIS RATE BECAUSE OF LONG-TERM ILLNESS WOULD AMOUNT TO LESS THAN ONE PERCENT PER YEAR OF THE TOTAL ENROLLMENT.



Students who previously had severe attendance problems, changed their behavioral patterns to allow for better school attendance. The students who still have attendance difficulties need to be taken under review. Many of the 66 students who missed more than twelve days were out of school because of extended illness, family emergencies, vacations etc. Thus only a part of the 4% excessively absent are out of school for illegitimate reasons. This handful of students will need other app approaches beyond the "old" and "new" attendance program to bring about better attendance.

The Independent Study program implemented this spring semester, is a great aid in the endeavor to help meet the needs of these students.

NAPA VALLEY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

NAPA HIGH SCHOOL
February 10, 1976

RESULTS OF NEW ATTENDANCE POLICY

1. Absenteeism has been reduced approximately 50% overall as compare with the three previous years, average of 4.5% versus 8-10%; non-ill absences have been reduced approximately 40%, 1.2% versus 2%.

2. Teachers have indicated that students are in classes more frequen resulting in less repetition by the teacher, smoother class operation and more material covered in many classes.

3. A survey of our faculty indicates an overwhelming majority desire to continue this attendance program (75 of 79) but many expressed a need to use automatic data processing to reduce the extra clerical load. Mr. Royer, our Data Processing Coordinator, has submitted a plan by which this could be accomplished. A number also expressed favorable response from parents when they telephoned concerning a student's absence from class.

4. A survey of our parents was conducted by a faculty and student committee on the evening of February 4th which indicated that most parents were only vaguely aware of the policy because their youngster did not have an attendance problem therefore they had not been affect ed by the policy. 127 of 165 parents responding are in favor of continuing the policy, many commenting very favorably.

5. Student reaction to the attendance program was measured by a student survey on February 5th. Results of this survey indicate that 66% of our students were not affected by the attendance policy because their attendance has always been good.

6. The number of pupils transferred to Continuation Education was less than the previous year, indicating better holding power with the new policy.

7. For the Spring semester we have formed a class, "Selected Independent Study Lap" designed for students who are having attendance difficulties. This is in keeping with out goal of providing additional curriculum options for students needing additional assistance.

8. Counselor contacts with students having attendance problems and their parents has increased considerably. This has resulted because of the required telephone call following the eighth absence from a class. Many parents have expressed favorable comments to counselors. Several have remarked that they are happy to see the school doing something to improve attendance. Many have also called the school to report their children truant after receiving the letter for four absences from a class or classes.

9. Our classified staff also responded to a survey with 100% indicat ing the program should be continued. Workload for attendance office personnel has increased with the mailing of letters daily. This extr work has been partially offset however, because fewer absence

clearances are required. The overall effect has been an improvement in attendance accounting. Data process procedures could assist greatly in this area as well.

10. The attendance Review Board met on all cases appealed. Extension of the number of days absent were granted for fifty-eight cases because of illness, bonifide emergencies of extenuating circumstances, and three were denied because of truancy.

11. Increased revenue to the district has also resulted because of reduction of non-ill absences. This increase is estimated to be approximately $6,640 for the Fall semester.

12. We now have a school policy that has improved our attendance considerably including developing more positive attendance habits in students. We have made curriculum revisions and additions to further meet the educational needs of students. These goals we established at the outset.

CONCLUSION:

We now have a school policy that has improved our attendance considerably including developing more positive attendance habits in students. We have made curriculum revisions and additions to further meet the educational needs of students. These goals we established at the outset.